

De Alvarez's Machiavelli

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It is an odd thing to be asked to contribute to a volume in honor of a man one has never met. Yet I feel as if I know Leo Paul S. de Alvarez. I have been reading *The Machiavellian Enterprise*¹ almost continually throughout the twenty years since its publication. What little Italian I can read, I taught myself in part by judiciously comparing de Alvarez's translations of *The Prince*² (published) and the *Discourses* (unpublished, but I managed to get it) to the original texts. I assume (and hope!) de Alvarez knows this, but students have recorded his graduate seminars on Machiavelli; I managed to get those, too, and have listened to them diligently.

I am reliably told that de Alvarez is sitting on a vast trove of unpublished work—a commentary on the *Discourses* and commentaries on Thucydides and Plutarch, most notably. If he refuses to publish these, I implore someone who has them to get them to me. Surreptitiously is fine; anonymity guaranteed.

But this is an occasion to discuss de Alvarez's published works. There are, as noted, only two: a translation of, and a commentary on, Machiavelli's *Prince*—the former published in 1980, the latter in 1999. In both, de Alvarez acknowledges the seminal influence of Leo Strauss on his understanding of Machiavelli.

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¹ De Alvarez, Leo Paul, *The Machiavellian Enterprise: A Commentary on The Prince* (De Kalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1999). Hereafter referred to as "commentary."

² Machiavelli, Niccolò, *The Prince* (originally published 1532), translated by Leo Paul S. de Alvarez (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1980). Hereafter referred to as "translation." Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from *The Prince* in this article are taken from this translation.

De Alvarez is less known than he should be not merely because he publishes so little but also because he has labored in the shadow of a far more famous (and prolific) Straussian scholar of Machiavelli: Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr. I do not mean to suggest a rivalry: each praises the other in his works and Mansfield in person has nothing but generous things to say about de Alvarez and his scholarship. I bring this up simply to make the point that de Alvarez is Mansfield's only peer as an interpreter of both Machiavelli and of Strauss on Machiavelli, and that too few (here I exempt Mansfield himself) realize this or give him credit.

Yet de Alvarez's departures from Strauss (which he nowhere explicitly acknowledges) are the most original, interesting and neglected aspects of his work. I shall focus on two.

A NOTE ON THE PLANS OF *THE PRINCE*

Strauss provides the most famous and widely-followed account of the plan of *The Prince*. In his path-breaking *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, he divides *The Prince's* twenty-six chapters into four sections:

- I. The various kinds of principalities³ (1–11)
- II. The prince and his enemies (12–14)
- III. The prince and his subjects or friends (15–23)
- IV. Prudence and chance (24–26)⁴

De Alvarez amends Strauss's plan at two places, in two ways. In the preface to his commentary, he presents the plan of *The Prince* this way:

³ Unlike Strauss and nearly all translators, de Alvarez consistently renders the Italian *principato* as "princiate" rather than "principality" so as to preserve Machiavelli's allusion to the Roman principate and its historical connection to republican government. Indeed, in the only surviving reference to *The Prince* written in Machiavelli's own hand, he refers to the title of his "little treatise" as "*De Principatibus*" (Latin: "Of Principates"), not, as the book has been long commonly known, "*Il Principe*" (Italian: "*The Prince*"). Given that all of *The Prince's* chapter titles are in Latin, it is reasonable to suspect that Machiavelli's Latin title is the one he intended. In any case, the Italian *principato*, being derived from the Latin *principatus*, would seem to convey a double meaning: an extent of territory and a people (or collection of peoples) ruled by one man, and an institution or office—typically monarchical but originally republican—occupied by a succession of men. "Principality" evokes only the former meaning. See translation, 6, n. 1 and commentary, 9.

⁴ Strauss, Leo, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Glencoe IL: The Free Press, 1958), 55. Hereafter "*Thoughts*."

Framing material: Medici and the possible Liberation of Italy (Epistle Dedicatory)

- I. Of Principates (1–11)
- II. Of Arms (12–14)
- III. Of the Qualities of the Prince (15–19)
- IV. Of the Prudence of the Prince (20–25)

Framing material: Medici and the possible Liberation of Italy (26)⁵

There are still four sections, but de Alvarez breaks Strauss's long third section more or less in half, and begins and ends the fourth section earlier.

Knowing readers will immediately notice that de Alvarez's plan is in some ways more satisfying than Strauss's. First, the de Alvarez plan explicitly takes into account *The Prince's* Epistle Dedicatory. Strauss indicates the importance of the Epistle Dedicatory by discussing it in greater length and depth than any prior scholar, so its omission from his own plan seems strange.⁶

Second, de Alvarez's plan acknowledges the extent to which Chapter 26 seems to "pair" with the Epistle Dedicatory more seamlessly than it does with Chapters 24 and 25. Indeed, it is hard to say what exactly the "Exhortation to Lay Hold of Italy and Vindicate Her Liberty from the Barbarians" has to do with "prudence and chance." But the four references in Chapter 26 to "your illustrious house" would seem to be references to the Medici, especially considering that the first such also refers to "the Church, of which it is now the prince," a clear reference to Giovanni de' Medici, who in 1513 became Pope Leo X. These appear to be the first references to the Medici since the Epistle Dedicatory, unless one counts Machiavelli's frequent use throughout *The Prince* of the second person pronoun. But, as Machiavelli makes clear in Chapter 15, the true antecedent for those pronouns, and thus the true addressee of *The Prince*, is "him who understands." Also, Chapter 26 opens similarly to other chapters that begin new sections (e.g., Chapters 12 and 15), referring to the things discussed "above."

⁵ Commentary, VIII.

⁶ *Thoughts*, 17–18, 20–24, 54, 70–71, 74–76, 215, 302 nn. 17 & 22, and 309 nn. 49 & 53. If one considers the Epistle Dedicatory as an integral part of *The Prince*, as Machiavelli surely intended, then the book has 27 chapters or "elements," 13 preceding and 13 following the central Chapter 13.

Third, de Alvarez is surely correct that Chapter 19 ends the discussion begun in Chapter 15. In the former, Machiavelli lists eleven pairs of “qualities” that bear some resemblance to traditional virtues and vices. In Chapters 16–18, he explores one pair each in the order in which he had listed them in Chapter 15. Then, instead of continuing through the list, he says at the beginning of Chapter 19 that because he has spoken “of the most important qualities mentioned above,” he will now turn to a brief discussion of all the others.

This much, then, establishes that de Alvarez is right that Strauss’s explicit statement of the plan of *The Prince* cannot be the final word. But how does that affect our interpretation of the work?

In his Conclusion, de Alvarez emends his account of the plan. He breaks up what in his Preface he had identified as *The Prince*’s first section (Chapters 1–11); Chapter 6, he now says, begins a new section. He also gives new names to all the sections:

Framing material: Medici and the possible Liberation of Italy (ED)

- I. “beginning of the hunt”/“learning how to wage war by learning how to conquer a foreign province” (1–5)
- II. “the ally and the enemy of the enterprise of Italy”/“the beginning of the war itself” (6–11)
- III. “arms and Religion”/“connection between faith and being armed or disarmed” (12–14)
- IV. the “one who is first”/the “new man” (15–19)
- V. prudence and necessity (20–25)

Framing material: Medici and the possible Liberation of Italy (26)

Yet, while this is de Alvarez’s “final” word on the plan, in the sense that it occurs last in his book, it is not truly his final word, in that attentive readers will notice that he amends even this plan along the way through his text and as it were “in advance.”

In two places, de Alvarez indicates that there is in fact—as Strauss had said—a break between Chapters 23 and 24. At the beginning of his commentary on Chapter 20, de Alvarez says that chapter “is in fact the beginning of a new division in the argument on the prudence of the prince, which comprises chapters XX through XXIII.”⁷ Then at the beginning of his treatment of Chapter 24, he says that “the chapter begins with a

⁷ Commentary, 103.

sentence that summarizes the previous section."⁸ One or the other of these might be dismissed as a mistake, but both together? In any case, de Alvarez is certainly correct that Machiavelli opens Chapter 24 similarly to the way he opens other chapters that begin new sections (again, cf. Chapters 12 and 15) and similarly to the way that he begins Chapter 26—a chapter which de Alvarez himself says constitutes a break from what has come before.

De Alvarez also notes, very unobtrusively, that Chapters 1 and 2 are “introductory” and that book truly “begins” with Chapter 3.⁹ He never in one place states his final account of the plan of *The Prince*, but it may be rendered thus:

Framing material: Medici and the possible Liberation of Italy (ED)

- I. Introduction/“object of the hunt and the hunter” (1–2)
- II. “Beginning of the hunt proper”/“learning how to wage war by learning how to conquer a foreign province” (3–5)
- III. “The ally and the enemy of the enterprise of Italy”/beginning of the war/the people v. the great/the people v. fortresses/spiritual power (6–11)
- IV. Of Arms and Religion/“connection between faith and being armed or disarmed”/spiritual warfare (12–14)
- V. Of the Qualities of the Prince/the “new man” (15–19)
- VI. Of the Prudence of the Prince/mastering necessity/policies and personnel/ (20–23)
- VII. Fortune and the Enterprise of Italy (24–25)

Framing material: Medici and the possible Liberation of Italy (26)

Does this mean that de Alvarez fundamentally breaks with Strauss? I do not believe so. I believe that Machiavelli intends both of these renderings of his plan to convey different levels of his argument. Strauss's account of the plan concerns *The Prince's* ostensible subject matter: the types of states, the types of armies, how to rule, etc. De Alvarez's account of the plan concerns the book's “exhortation,” or what Machiavelli is rallying his readers, or some of them, to *do*.

⁸ Commentary, 117.

⁹ Commentary, 137.

What does he want them to do? Strauss addresses the scholarly controversy over the “surprise”¹⁰ of *Prince* 26—that is, the alleged incongruity between that chapter’s passionate call for liberation and the seemingly dispassionate analysis of the prior 25 chapters. Strauss, contra most scholars, finds *The Prince’s* final chapter not all that surprising: “one merely has to read the *Prince* with ordinary care, in order to see that the call to liberate Italy with which the book ends is the natural conclusion of the book.”¹¹

What the “exhortation plan”—which de Alvarez was the first and still only to explicate—shows is that the culminating exhortation to liberate Italy has more than one meaning. Explicating the deeper meaning may be said to be the true purpose of *The Machiavellian Enterprise*.

READING *THE PRINCE* IN THE LIGHT OF THE *DISCOURSES*

To see this more clearly, let us look at de Alvarez’s other major departure from Strauss. Strauss, in refuting the claim that *The Prince* and the *Discourses* convey wildly different teachings, points to nearly identical references in the Epistles Dedicatory of both books in which Machiavelli appears to assert that each contains “everything he knows.”¹² De Alvarez parses the two passages a bit more finely and concludes that Machiavelli makes this claim only of the *Discourses*:

The following commentary is based on the promise by Machiavelli that *The Prince* enables one to understand all that he has come to know. In his *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livy*, Machiavelli declares that he has expressed in it all that he has learned through practice and reading. *The Discourses*, as one would expect, is then more comprehensive than *The Prince*. He does not express all that he knows in *The Prince*; it will, however, shorten the time needed for our examination of, and reflection on, his thought.¹³

This interpretation is warranted by Machiavelli’s own words. From the Epistle Dedicatory of *The Prince*:

¹⁰ *Thoughts*, 62–65.

¹¹ *Thoughts*, 63.

¹² *Thoughts*, 17. Cf. 19–23, 31, 53, 77, 133–134, 198, 223, and 286.

¹³ *Commentary*, 7.

... there cannot be had a greater gift from me than to give to one the faculty of being able to understand all that I, in so many years and in so many hardships and dangers, have come to know and to understand.¹⁴

From the Epistle Dedicatory of the *Discourses*:

... in it [i.e., in this book, the *Discourses*] I have expressed how much I know and have learned through a long practice and continual reading in the things of the world.¹⁵

In other words, Machiavelli promises of *The Prince* only that it provides the “faculty” or the tools to understand his thought; only of the *Discourses* does he say that the book contains “how much”—i.e., all—he knows. The *Discourses* would then seem to supersede *The Prince*. Yet few read the latter in the light of the former. Even de Alvarez himself resists this seemingly natural conclusion: “I have tried to avoid referring to the *Discourses* as a means of explicating *The Prince*.”¹⁶ He does not say why he has tried to so avoid. But he does violate his own prohibition.

In his discussion of *Prince* 24, de Alvarez notes “Machiavelli’s enigmatic statement” that although Philip V of Macedon “lost the dominion of some cities, the kingdom nevertheless remained his.”¹⁷ To understand the meaning of this passage, de Alvarez says,

... we need to turn to the description of Philip’s adventures against the Romans. Those adventures are described in several passages in the *Discourses* (II 1, 4; III 10, 37). If we consider these passages, we shall see how subtly Machiavelli has woven his text in chapter XXIV of *The Prince*.¹⁸

And:

¹⁴ Translation, 2.

¹⁵ *Discourses of Niccolò Machiavelli on the First Decade of Titus Livy* (originally published 1531), translated by Leo Paul S. de Alvarez, 2006; unpublished. (Citations to the *Discourses* in this article will be to this translation.) To be fair to Strauss, I note that in later passages of *Thoughts on Machiavelli* he does admit that the *Discourses* is in certain respects more “thorough” than *The Prince*; see especially 132–134.

¹⁶ Commentary, 124 n. 2.

¹⁷ Translation, 144.

¹⁸ Commentary, 120.

... One can read of the strategy and tactics of Philip of Macedon in the *Discourses* ... [I]t does seem to me that we are invited to look at the way in which he resisted the Romans. It is especially with respect to Philip that one sees how condensed and allusive *The Prince* actually is.¹⁹

De Alvarez then proceeds to read *Prince* 24 in light of Philip's appearances in the *Discourses*. In so doing, he elucidates this particularly elusive chapter even as he instructs us, by example, how to use the *Discourses* to better understand *The Prince*, and how to use *The Prince* to better understand Machiavelli's thought.

LOSING, AND KEEPING, THE REGNUM

The title of *Prince* 24 promises to answer the question of why the princes of Italy have lost their "kingdom." "Kingdom" (the Latin *regnum*) here is notably singular while "princes" is plural. Somehow, many princes have lost one kingdom.²⁰ Since there never has been a "kingdom of Italy" that was lost by several princes, this would seem to indicate that Machiavelli does not have in mind a conventional historical example. Also, since the word "kingdom" reappears in the body of the chapter (though in Italian), we are invited to connect the kingdom that the princes of Italy lost to the kingdom that Philip retained. Though Philip lost to the Romans, he nonetheless—and unlike the princes Italy—somehow retained his kingdom.

De Alvarez begins his discussion by noting that "[r]egnum was used only once before."²¹ In fact, it has appeared twice before: in the title of Ch. 4 and in the Latin quotation that closes Ch. 6 (de Alvarez discusses only the second usage).²² The title of Chapter 4 speaks of the "kingdom

¹⁹ Commentary, 124–125 n. 2.

²⁰ Both Mansfield and Angelo Codevilla, in their translations, render *regnum* in the title of *Prince* 24 as "states," plural, which I believe obscures this chapter's connection to the only two other uses of *regnum* in *The Prince* and alleviates this title of its unconventional, even ungrammatical, and therefore puzzling character.

²¹ Commentary, 120. One page earlier, de Alvarez similarly says that "*Regnum* is used only once before (in chapter VI)."

²² Considering that *regnum* appears only three times in *The Prince*, two of those three times in chapter titles, both of these in two of the only three chapter titles that contain proper nouns, and considering also the deep inner connection between Chapters 4 and 24—which de Alvarez himself explicates more thoroughly than anyone—it is not easy to dismiss this omission as a mistake.

[*regnum*] of Darius," i.e., the Persian Empire, or—as de Alvarez brings to our attention—"the kingdom that claims dominion over all of mankind."²³

The Latin quotation in Chapter 6 says that a young Hiero of Syracuse had such virtue that, even before he became a prince, he "lacked nothing of being a king but a kingdom."²⁴ In the Epistle Dedicatory of the *Discourses*, Machiavelli uses this same quotation (though slightly altered) to make the same point: Hiero "to be a prince lacked nothing but the principate."²⁵ De Alvarez connects the dots: in this respect, the young Hiero is the same as the two young friends to whom Machiavelli dedicates the *Discourses*: all three are princes by nature, or men who deserve to be princes regardless of whether or not they actually hold the principate.

The one book in which Machiavelli explained everything he knows is dedicated not to sitting princes but to potential princes. What does he expect of these potential princes? In the preface to Book II of the *Discourses*, Machiavelli says that:

... since [the lack of virtue and the vice prevalent in present times] is a thing so manifest that everyone sees it, I shall be so spirited as manifestly to say what I shall understand of those [ancient] times and these, so that the minds of young men who will read these writings of mine could flee from these and prepare themselves to imitate those, whenever fortune would give them the occasion. For it is the office of a good man that he teach to others that good that you were not able to work because of the malignity of the times and fortune, so that when many are capable, some of them more loved by Heaven might be able to work it.²⁶

Note that the phrase "these writings of mine" could well refer to more than just the *Discourses*. Note also that it is similarly near the center of *The Prince* that Machiavelli discloses his true addressee: "him who

²³ Commentary, 20.

²⁴ Here I utilize the Mansfield translation because this rendering preserves the connection between *regnandum* ("being a king") and *regnum* ("kingdom"). De Alvarez renders *regnandum* as "ruling" (translation, 35).

²⁵ *Discourses*, Epistle Dedicatory, 3. In the book that Machiavelli himself entitled "On Principates," he goes out of his way to refer to Hiero as a "king" rather than a "prince," even though he refers to him as a "prince" in the *Discourses*. Also, in *The Prince*, the quotation is placed in quotation marks and given in Latin, whereas in the *Discourses* it is paraphrased in Italian. Machiavelli seems determined to use the word *regnum* in *The Prince*.

²⁶ *Discourses* Book II, 4–5.

understands."²⁷ If we combine these two indications, we may conclude that Machiavelli's intent is to instruct and inspire princes-by-nature— young men who are capable of understanding—to reestablish virtue when the time is ripe.

Prince 24 is the only chapter in that book in which Machiavelli speaks of "our princes."²⁸ In the text of that chapter he again he speaks of "princes," plural, who lost their "principate," singular. The context would seem to be those same princes of Italy who lost the *regnum*. Yet de Alvarez suggests another meaning:

Machiavelli declares that the purpose of his writing is to turn the *animi* [spirits] of young men from the weakness of present times, making them willing to prepare themselves to imitate ancient times, so that someone may carry his enterprise to completion. His friends are such young men, and they would seem to be the true "princes of our times." If the princes of Italy have lost the kingdom, then these latter princes would seem to be the ones to regain the kingdom.²⁹

In the Epistle Dedicatory of the *Discourses*, Machiavelli adds a consideration that he omits when discussing Hiero in *Prince* 6. He contrasts the deserving Hiero with the undeserving Perseus of Macedon (son and heir of Philip V) who "had no part of being a king but a kingdom."³⁰ But in a sense, each received his just deserts. Hiero actually did attain the principate and maintained himself in that state for 54 years until his natural death at age 90.³¹ Perseus by contrast lost the kingdom he inherited from his father, who had maintained it even in the face of his own losses to the Romans.³² Perseus would then seem to be analogous to those princes of Italy who lost the *regnum*, while Hiero would seem to be an example of Machiavelli's expectations or hopes for his young friends who deserve to be princes.

If Perseus represents the failed past and Hiero the potentially successful future, what is the significance of Philip?

²⁷ Translation, Chapter XV, 93.

²⁸ Translation, 144; cf. commentary, 120–121.

²⁹ Commentary, 121.

³⁰ *Discourses*, Book II, 3.

³¹ Livy, XXIV 4; cf. Polybius, VII 8.

³² Livy, XXXXIII 41–46; cf. Plutarch, *Aemilius Paulus*, 16–19.

THE PHILIP OF THE DISCOURSES

The first two instances in which Machiavelli mentions Philip V of Macedon in the *Discourses* appear to be incidental to Philip himself. That is to say, Philip is simply used in a list to illustrate some larger point.

In I 31, the point under discussion is the Roman policy of leniency toward generals' errors, lest fear of punishment trouble a general's mind in the run-up to a "difficult and dangerous" battle or campaign. Machiavelli cites three examples of such difficult and dangerous endeavors: sending an army into Greece to fight Philip of Macedon, into Italy to fight Hannibal, or against those people whom the Romans had conquered before. Machiavelli thus seems to grant to Philip the very high honor of being grouped with Rome's greatest and deadliest enemy. One might question this interpretation on the ground that one would expect that fighting peoples one has already conquered will not be that difficult. Yet as Livy's entire first decade shows, and Machiavelli explicates at length, that was not the case for the Romans, who had to fight the Latins, Sabines, Samnites, Etruscans, Hernici, Volsci, and the Aequi—to say nothing of the Gauls or Carthaginians—well more than once each. Perhaps Machiavelli means to indicate that no conquest is ever really final; one never knows when one may have to fight the same enemy again. And it may be especially psychologically wearying to have to face once again an enemy one had thought was already defeated.

In *Discourses* II 1, Machiavelli attributes Roman success to their always managing to fight one war at a time.³³ The Romans were able to manage this, he says, because they attained such reputation that neighbors feared to attack and instead simply watched as the Romans gobbled up one city after another, all the while hoping their own turn would never come. Machiavelli illustrates this process through the Romans' encounter with the Carthaginians, who—despite being "of great power and of great reputation"—not only watched as the Samnites and the Tuscans fell to Rome but actually sought Rome's favor. Machiavelli gives three additional examples of this policy working its intended effect; Philip is the central one. He then makes the first of four direct references to *The Prince*

³³ In fact, as even a casual reading of Livy and Polybius clearly shows, the Romans very often fought two or more wars at the same time.

in the *Discourses*³⁴, saying that he will not here discuss how the Romans entered other provinces because he has discussed that at length in his treatise on principates. The reference is to the center of *Prince* 3, where Machiavelli says that the Romans always entered provinces with the support of disaffected provincials and that he wishes the province of Greece alone to suffice as an example. Philip was not the one who invited the Romans into Greece, but once they were there he attempted to utilize “persuasions” on them, but they never let these “induce them to be friendly with him without [first] putting him down.”³⁵ The Romans saw from afar that Philip would or could become a problem down the road, “therefore they wished rather to make war with [him] in Greece so that it should not have to be waged with [him] in Italy.”³⁶ This would seem to be a rather preposterous claim to make on behalf of Philip V of Macedon, a prince who could barely hold his own on his native soil and who had no prospect whatsoever of crossing the Adriatic. Does Machiavelli wish to make us think of another, far more successful Philip—and in particular of his son?³⁷

If we may speculate (under de Alvarez’s tutelage), it would seem that the Romans here indicated are in fact the Christian Romans—i.e., the early Christian proselytizers and their apologists—whom the ancient philosophers (Philip and others) realized much too late were a real threat. The philosophers watched as the new religion suppressed the ancient gods and their cults and offered no succor because they did not consider the destruction of pagan religion a threat to themselves. This turned out to be a massive error, for which philosophy was still paying a steep price in Machiavelli’s time.

³⁴ If I am not mistaken; the others are at the beginning of II 20, the end of III 19 and the end of III 42.

³⁵ Translation, 15.

³⁶ Translation, 16.

³⁷ Although the reference here is to Philip V, Machiavelli enjoys fuzzing up his examples when it suits his purposes. As I have argued elsewhere (“Of Conquest: An Interpretation of Chapters 3–5 of Machiavelli’s *Prince*”), Machiavelli’s references to “Philip and Alexander” often refer metaphorically to God, Father and Son. Also, in a marvelous coincidence seemingly purpose-made for Machiavelli’s use, the first letters of the names of this pair of conquerors, father and son, are the same as the first letters of the names of the two greatest philosophers, teacher and student. Machiavelli’s use of Philip and Alexander as stand-ins for Plato and Aristotle is perhaps the supreme example of what Leo Strauss calls Machiavelli’s knowing “how to make use of the unexpected gift” (*Thoughts*, 121).

The topic of *Discourses* II 4—which contains the third and central mention of Philip in the book—is republican modes of expansion. Machiavelli names and analyzes three such modes: leagues (the Tuscan mode), alliances (the Roman mode) and direct rule (the Spartan-Athenian mode). Machiavelli endorses the Roman mode and says that leagues are second-best. But he undercuts this judgement by citing as an example the Aetolian League: we recall from *Prince* 3 that it was precisely this league that brought the Romans into Greece,³⁸ and we know where that led: to the enslavement of Greece.

Philip is cited as a witness to the effect that there is something inherently faithless about leagues. Machiavelli says that leagues, once they reach their “fixed limit,” turn to two ways of making money: offering “protection” to “supplicants” and soldiering “for others.” Philip, in “parley” with “Titus Quinctius Flaminius” and a praetor of the Aetolians, “reproved [the latter] for avarice and infidelity, saying that the Aetolians were not ashamed to soldier with someone and then to send their men also into the service of the enemy, such that the insignia of Aetolia were often seen in two opposing armies.”³⁹ Machiavelli misstates the name of the Roman: the consul to whom Philip went to parley was Titus Quinctius Flaminius, not “Flaminius.”⁴⁰ (Machiavelli also misstates his name in *Prince* 24, calling him “Titus Quintius” rather than Quinctius.⁴¹) We may speculate as to the meaning of this error. There actually was a historical Flaminius—Gaius Flaminius Nepos—who led Roman forces in the catastrophic defeat at Lake Trasimene.⁴² (He is referred to, though not by name, in *Discourses* III 40, whose topic is the gloriousness of using fraud to manage war.) By this mistake, does Machiavelli mean to transform Flaminius—the victor over Philip and conqueror of Greece—into a “loser”? Is he indicating that the Roman conquest of Greece was in fact, or in hindsight, a loss?

Be that as it may, Machiavelli does not name the man whom Philip reproved, but Livy does: it was “Alexander”—not, obviously, Alexander the Great but “a leading Aetolian . . . who was, for an Aetolian, an

³⁸ Translation, 14.

³⁹ *Discourses*, Book II, 22–23.

⁴⁰ Livy, XXXII 32.

⁴¹ Translation, 124.

⁴² Livy, XXII 4–7.

eloquent speaker.”⁴³ The allusion, then, is to a reproof against those who sell eloquence to both sides of an argument, i.e., sophists.⁴⁴ “Philip” reproving “Alexander” is also, allusively, a reproof by the father against the son, or by the old against the young. The primal spirit of philosophy—bold, uncompromising, independent—accuses its successors of cynicism, venality, indolence and incompetence. But it is also a reproof by the young against the old: Machiavelli goes out of his way in *Prince* 24 to clarify that the Philip under discussion was “not the father of Alexander,” i.e., this is a much younger Philip. The young reprove the old for the battles the latter lost, or even failed to fight, leaving the young in an untenable position. The lesson of both reproofs is the same: eloquence must find the spirit to take its own side in a fight and learn to defend itself.

As the chapter ends, Machiavelli backtracks and concludes that the league is to be preferred to the alliance after all. The so-called “alliance,” he has quietly shown, is actually a disguised form of indirect rule with one city at the head.⁴⁵ “Allies” are at best junior partners and in truth subjects. A key element of the Roman mode was to conquer outside provinces (i.e., outside “Italy”) and then use the strength gained from those foreign conquests to subjugate Rome’s nearby “allies.” This mode, Machiavelli further asserts, had never been used before nor has it been used since.

But is that really true? On reflection, it seems curious that Machiavelli lumps together the very different Athenian and Spartan foreign policies as if they were identical. Sparta famously forswore foreign commitments, in large part because its formidable army was required to stay home and keep the lid on the city’s large slave population. Athens by contrast built up the extensive Delian League—which actually more resembled the Roman mode of disguised, indirect rule than the direct rule of subjects. It would seem that the Roman mode *had* been tried before.

To speculate as to the meaning of this particular Machiavellian “error,” we may analogize the allegedly unprecedented nature of the Roman mode of conquest to the unprecedented innovations of

⁴³ Livy., XXXII 33.

⁴⁴ Cf., Mansfield, Harvey C., *Machiavelli’s New Modes and Orders* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), 201.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Thoughts*, 102 and Mansfield, 200.

Christianity. The Hebrew God is the first to insist that He is the only god⁴⁶ but—like the pagan gods—demands to be worshipped only by one people and, indeed, deliberately excludes the rest of mankind. Christianity is the first religion to extend its claim to all mankind, to welcome all peoples and, indeed, to seek to convert the entire world. It is the first to utilize propaganda or spiritual warfare, an innovation necessary for realizing its universalist aspirations. And it is the first to separate civil and religious authority, or to sever the connection between law and the divine. Taken together, these modes have only been used once (Islam is universalist and proselytizes but restores the ancient equivalence of religious and civil law).

Furthermore, the Roman utilization of “outside” conquests is analogous to Christianity’s marshalling of the other world to dominate in this one. Christianity’s apparent respect for the civil law—“render unto Caesar”—masks its indirect rule. We are meant to be reminded, I think, of *Prince* 5, where Machiavelli says that the Romans tried to hold the Greek cities by “freeing them and leaving them to their own laws” but did not succeed and were thus compelled to destroy “many” cities in that province.⁴⁷ As I have argued elsewhere, “Greece” in this context means the orders of ancient liberty and philosophy, of the world before Christian Revelation.⁴⁸ As de Alvarez puts it:

... The rule of the Romans was accepted because it appeared at first as if the member republics were to be left to rule themselves with their own laws in a league of equals, but that was only the appearance. The truth was the domination of one city, Rome. That domination would not have been possible, however, without the conquest of outside provinces.⁴⁹

What is really being described in *Discourses* II 4 is not just the Roman destruction of liberty throughout the ancient world—which even Christians such as Augustine do not deny, but claim was ordained by God

⁴⁶ Cf. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Part III, “On Apostates,” 2.

⁴⁷ Translation, 29. Actually, the Romans destroyed only one Greek city: Corinth. Machiavelli deliberately overstates Roman beastliness in order to strengthen the second meaning of “Roman”: the Christian Romans who destroyed pagan temples, burned pagan texts and suppressed the pagan religion. Cf. “Of Conquest,” 39.

⁴⁸ “Of Conquest,” 38–39.

⁴⁹ Commentary, 122.

to prepare the world for Christianity⁵⁰—but the Christian cooption, supplantment, suppression and even destruction not merely of pagan religions but of all other forms of thought. This, de Alvarez points out, is the real reason we are to prefer Tuscan leagues to Roman “alliances”: the latter destroyed the liberty of the world. If liberty is important, we must reject the Roman way and choose the Tuscan.

But what about the “Athenian-Spartan” mode? Machiavelli dismisses direct rule as “wholly useless” because it requires not merely arms but being “great in arms,” and also securing “companions.”⁵¹ So why not get both? This is of course possible—but once one has both, one has essentially abandoned the Athenian-Spartan mode in favor of the Roman mode.

According to Machiavelli's explicit statements, the essential difference between the Athenian-Spartan and the Roman modes is the presence or lack of arms and companions. But of course it is nonsense to suggest that Athens or Sparta lacked either arms or companions: both were well-armed, and even the relatively isolationist Spartans had the Peloponnesian League. What is Machiavelli getting at here? I believe a key to solving the puzzle is to recall that, for the ancient philosophers, the best form of rule was direct rule—specifically, the direct rule of the wise. The metaphoric meaning of Athens and Sparta in this context further comes into focus when we recall that the former was the city where the doctrine of the best regime was formulated while the latter was the actual city that most closely resembled that regime and was most frequently praised by classical political philosophers (however much they caveated that praise by pointing out ways that Sparta fell short). To lack arms is to be unable to defend oneself; the ancient philosophers lacked spiritual arms. To lack companions means to lack allies; the ancient philosophers disdained the common people.

Going forward, the choice before “our princes,” de Alvarez writes, is threefold:

First, they may join the Tuscan league, which has shown that it can provide power and glory, where the princes will be equals; second, they may choose to be made companions or allies of a city that pretends to be

⁵⁰ *City of God Against the Pagans*, IV–V.

⁵¹ *Discourses*, Book II, 20.

a league of equals but that turns out to be the domination of a single city, using the power derived from outside kingdoms and provinces to destroy liberty within; or, third, they simply put themselves under the rule of a single city, as was the policy of Sparta and Athens—which we interpret to be the rule of the best regime.⁵²

“Our princes” are to reject both Christian modes and ancient philosophic doctrine in favor of an armed alliance with the people.

Let us now turn to *Discourses* III 10. The ostensible topic here is the possibility of avoiding battle. In an implicit condemnation of Christian pacifism and philosophic detachment, Machiavelli insists that battle cannot be avoided. But he modifies that judgement as the chapter progresses: battle *can* be avoided in this or that time or place, just not forever, not in the aggregate. Philip's war with the Romans is then cited as but one of “a thousand examples.”⁵³ Philip did what he could for as long as he could to avoid battle with the Romans on terms unfavorable to himself. First, he placed himself on a mountaintop and fortified his position, believing that the Romans would not dare “go to find him.” But they did, and chased him from the mountain. Second, “not wishing to enclose himself in towns,” Philip contrived to stay “many miles distant” from the Romans. But by this mode, Philip merely lengthened the war, worsening himself and harming his subjects. Hence he finally consented to battle. Machiavelli does not here state the outcome: Philip lost!

We are left to wonder: was there any value at all to Philip's delays? By not stating the outcome, Machiavelli seems to wish to indicate that there was. After all, Philip somehow kept “the kingdom.” So in some sense, Philip won, or at least did not fully and finally lose.

ARMED PRUDENCE

To help solve this puzzle, de Alvarez guides us in considering the deeper meanings of Philip's attempts to evade the Romans. To ascend the mountaintop is to put oneself at a remove from the people, from the very earth itself. To fortify one's position is to put oneself at further remove from the people. Fortresses, we recall from *Prince* 20, are useful for princes who fear their own people more than foreigners. This was the strategy of the ancient philosophers: to shut themselves up in schools and other

⁵² Commentary, 122.

⁵³ *Discourses*, Book III, 41.

closed circles while using esoteric writing to hide their teaching from the people.⁵⁴ But they were flushed out by Christian “philosophers” and Church authorities the same way Philip was flushed out by the Romans.⁵⁵

Philip’s attempt to remain distant from the Romans similarly failed. We recall being told in *Prince* 10 that a prudent prince can withstand a long siege, yet Philip refused to avail himself of this mode. De Alvarez analogizes this error to an “unwillingness to accept the earth as the only place the human being has.”⁵⁶ Finally, Philip bows to the inevitable and fights. In this respect he is superior in “glory” to the ancient philosophers who never risked battle in the field. Sooner or later, Machiavelli insists, battle will have to be risked, and not only is it possible you might win, even if you don’t, it’s better to fight and lose than to lose without fighting:

There is also one other thing that is much to be considered here, which is that one ought, even in losing, to want to acquire glory, and there is more glory if one has been conquered by force than if you have been made to lose by some other inconvenience.⁵⁷

One can acquire glory even in losing, provided one makes an attempt to win.

Philip takes his final bow in the *Discourses* in Book III, Chapter 37. His example this time seems to contradict what Machiavelli had said in III 10, viz., that Philip’s situation worsened as he failed to protect (and even himself despoiled) his own subjects. Now Machiavelli praises Philip for having “abandoned and destroyed much of his countryside.”⁵⁸ This praise

⁵⁴ Cf. “Spiritual Warfare in Machiavelli’s *Prince*,” 169–186, esp. 175–177.

⁵⁵ Augustine, *City of God* Book VIII may be said to be dedicated to exposing the ancient philosophic doctrine while retaining those parts that are compatible with Christianity and discarding the rest. An interesting—and understudied—topic is the extent to which Machiavelli’s writings are replies to, and intended refutations of, Augustine. For instance, it was principally Augustine’s *City of God* that tarnished the reputations of ancient heroes—and of Rome specifically—by arguing that all that their apparent virtue was nothing more than “resplendent vice.” Machiavelli’s work—especially the *Discourses*—is intended to rehabilitate Rome specifically and antiquity generally. Similarly, his critique of the weakness of ancient philosophy partly masks a defense of philosophy against Augustine’s cooptions and dismissals.

⁵⁶ Commentary, 123.

⁵⁷ *Discourses*, Book III, 43.

⁵⁸ *Discourses*, Book III, 121.

is reminiscent of his recommendation, in *Prince* 10, that the prince who cannot appear in the field against an enemy instead retreat into the town and take no account of the countryside. In both cases, the course of action is clearly second-best: it's better to be able to meet an enemy in the field and to be able to defend the countryside. But even this second-best solution is better than setting out to defend a thing and failing: in the latter case, the loss to one's reputation is worse than the harm arising from losing something one deliberately declines to defend. We are perhaps meant to understand that philosophy preserved some of its reputation by not having ever explicitly committed itself to the succor of the people, by not having failed to do something it had explicitly pledged to do.

We are now in a position to better understand what Machiavelli means, in *Prince* 24, when he says that Philip, despite his losses, somehow kept "the kingdom." De Alvarez is worth quoting at length on this point:

The Romans conquered Greece and extinguished its liberty, and Philip was finally unable to defend Greece. His modes, then, ought not be imitated by those who wish to recover liberty. Nonetheless, his adventures show, by experience, the alternatives that may be taken by those who would learn from that great defeat. We are to learn from the Romans how one may conquer, even if in the end we are to use not Roman modes but Tuscan ones. This Philip was not able to do what a former Philip and his successor did. But this much lesser ancient captain—one who remains lesser even when taken in proportion—nevertheless retained the kingdom, at least in part. In other words, the conquest of Greece was not as final as everyone has perhaps thought. The "iniquity of the country" saved Philip; that is, the iniquity of nature, both human and otherwise, saved him from being "wholly consumed." Perhaps, then, the kingdom can never be wholly lost. And there are many modes that a prudent prince may use first to defend and then to attack—perhaps a fortified town, perhaps distance, perhaps a league. What is certain is that one can no longer go the way of Sparta or Athens.⁵⁹

The *regnum* that the princes of Italy have lost and that Philip, in some part, retained is the earth, this world, the kingdom of man, as opposed to the City of God or the other world. Philip represents, by turns, philosophy's failures and successes at resisting Christian encroachment and rule. Philosophy's strategy of fortification and retreat must on one

⁵⁹ Commentary, 123–124.

level be counted a failure: by abandoning the countryside—i.e., the natural habitat of the common people—philosophy left the people prey to the Romans, i.e., the Christian Romans, who have held them in thrall ever since, much to the detriment of both liberty and philosophy and especially to freedom of thought. Yet it was precisely via fortification—by forming closed circles and transmitting its teaching esoterically—that philosophy was able to preserve itself and survive. This makes possible its revival in Machiavelli’s time. But going forward, fortresses—which are, recall, not choiceworthy for their own sakes but only from unfortunate necessity—will no longer be necessary, for the philosophers will no longer have cause to fear the people.

We see also that some of Philip’s “successes” are in fact prospective or proscriptive—that is, intended as models for future action by Machiavelli’s successors. The strategy of forming a “league” represents perhaps the most novel aspect of Machiavelli’s teaching: his proposal for an alliance between the people and a certain subset of the great, i.e., between the non-philosophic multitude and the philosophic elite. The latter will remain the senior partner in the arrangement but will, for the first time in history, put their learning to use and to work in service to the people, to the common good. De Alvarez analogizes Philip’s strategy of distance to time: through writing, Machiavelli speaks to others beyond his time, thereby protecting himself and potentially reaching those fortunate enough to face a more suitable occasion for the revival of liberty and philosophy than he faces.

EXHORTATION, REVISITED

Let us, finally, revisit de Alvarez’s account of the plan of *The Prince* to see with greater clarity how unravelling the mysteries of Philip helps us to understand the book’s “exhortation.”

The Epistle Dedicatory introduces the book and frames the discussion. We learn here that the purpose of *The Prince* is to teach “the Medici” to rule, the Medici being understood more broadly to mean the youth, or the talented youth, or the talented youth of the future, “those favored by fortune and virtue, to take up the banner of liberation.”⁶⁰

The first section identifies the object of liberation: *this* world, not the other or next world (note the absence of ecclesiastical principates in

⁶⁰ Commentary, 137.

Machiavelli's initial taxonomy). Machiavelli here begins to indicate who the liberator—the true addressee of the exhortation—will be: the natural prince, the one who is first by nature.

The second section begins what Alvarez calls “the hunt,” or the specific quest of liberation. The object is “Italy,” what is nearest and most “ours,” but which is to be considered from the perspective of a foreigner. We are to learn to conquer, or reconquer, our ancestral home, which has been lost to us and yet somehow remains ours. To regain the world, we must approach the task as a foreigner or outsider, for we have been dispossessed. We learn in this section among other things that, despite appearances, the republican spirit is not dead. We also learn of the possibility of universal acquisition: it has been accomplished before and may be possible again.

The third section identifies the “ally and the enemy of the enterprise of Italy.” The ally is the people, the common people; the enemy is the Church, its prelates, and its compromised “philosophers,” a/k/a the monks, the theologians, and above all the philosopher-saints such as Augustine and Aquinas. In this section, the war truly begins and Machiavelli shows the means necessary to wage it.

The fourth and central section explains the weapons of war necessary for the liberation of Italy. The weapons are spiritual, to be wielded by writer-captains and their followers. The aim is the destruction of the enemy, the persuasion of the people, and the arming of prudence, which will never again lack the means to take the field against an enemy. “For the first time in the history of human thought, the possibility of an armed prudence is suggested.”⁶¹

The fifth section describes the qualities of the new man, the new prince, the one who is first by nature. He is natural but also new because such a man—a prudent man, spiritually armed—has never before ruled in the temporal. At most he has ruled an archipelago of academies and monasteries. That must change. Unprecedented times call for a new understanding of the virtues, in which the philosophic tradition is not so much discarded as modified to suit the necessities of the new situation. Vice is as necessary as virtue and in some circumstances more necessary.

The sixth section explains the strategy and tactics of the new prince, or shows how the new prince is to achieve the goal of liberating

⁶¹ Commentary, 140.

Italy. There are two chapters on specific policies followed by two on personnel, as the prince will not be able to act alone. Machiavelli speaks of these things only in the most general way because the war cannot be won by adherence to a rulebook. The new prince must above all understand causes and, via such knowledge, know for himself how to act in particular situations. Machiavelli cannot predict everything, nor does he wish to rob his successors of their deserved glory for acting well in their own times.

Only in the seventh section are the true stakes finally revealed: the true object of the hunt is nature itself, or nature as acted upon by fortune. Man cannot fully conquer Fortuna but he has far more power over Her than he has hitherto supposed. This fatalism or lack of *virtù*—lack of confidence or assertiveness—is what led him into the present morass. The highest meaning of the spiritual war is a war within, a war for the inner spirit of man. The goal is to reawaken his awareness of and appreciation for his own power and to convince him to reject all doctrines that limit his power. The culminating exhortation is then an exhortation to liberate not just “Italy” but the spirit of man from enervating, otherworldly doctrines.

As medieval philosophers from al-Farabi to Maimonides to Aquinas showed in establishing the genre, the commentary at its peak is a philosophic work in its own right. My only ambition for the present study is to establish that *The Machiavellian Enterprise* deserves a place of honor among the greatest philosophic commentaries.